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The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

● APRIL 1996

HOLY IMMANUEL CHURCH, MAVILODAI



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CONTENTS

Editorial	1
Growing and Sharing together in Unity	2
Community of the Cross	5
Citation	8
News from All Over	9
News from the Dioceses	10
Book Review - W.C.C. Publications	12

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THE SOUTH INDIA CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

APRIL 1996

EDITOR

REV. DR. P.C. DASS BABU

MEGH DEEP

BEGUMPET

HYDERABAD—500 016. (A.P.) PHONE : 847436

HON. BUSINESS MANAGER

PROF. GEORGE KOSHY, General Secretary

Synod C.S.I. Centre

5, WHITES ROAD

ROYAPETTAH, MADRAS—600 014

Phone : 8521566

All remittances and communications regarding subscriptions and advertisements to be sent to the Hon. Business Manager.

HON. AGENT IN U.K. REV. R.J. SLEIGH,

162, Sweetbrier Lane,

Heavitree, Exeter, Devon EX1 3DG. U.K.

Tel No. (01392) 57692

RATES OF SUBSCRIPTION PER ANNUM

Subscription in India	Rs. 35.00
Single Copy	Rs. 4.00

SUBSCRIPTION OVERSEAS

	Sea Mail	Air Mail
U.S.A.	\$ 10.00	\$ 15.00
U.K.	£ 5.00	£ 10.00
Australia	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00
New Zealand	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00

25 Years Ago!

This year will hardly have begun before the new Constitution of India comes into force and India becomes a Republic. To that Republic our loyalty is pledged, not of necessity, but gladly and proudly. There are in the constitution declarations of human rights and safeguards for minorities. It is good that they should be here. But all history shows that paper provisions and safeguards are of no real value, unless there is the goodwill which in fact makes them unneeded. The security of the Christian community rests fully upon the service which its members render to India.

— *Churchman*, 1950.

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Parkal Mission

The missionary activities of the Madhya Kerala diocese in the Parkal area of Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh which comes under the diocese of Karimnagar, could be reckoned as one of the best missionary enterprises of the church of South India. By and large, Parkal area is a backward region in every sense of the word, besides being a remote place.

God has inspired the diocese to send out missionaries to this pocket to carry out the missionary activities. It is rather rewarding experience to see all the missionaries both clergy and laity who laboured in the mission field have been the people of prayer, zeal and enthusiasm. The Diocese of Madhya Kerala, right from the beginning, has been deputing such personnel who could translate its vision into reality in propagating the gospel and in establishing institutions to educate people, specially the down trodden; to offer medical aid and preach the word of God. In order to accomplish this mandate, the Madhya Kerala diocese had to open many corollating institutions such as a full fledged school and an ashram for the orphans. A big church and a parsonage—all in Parkal town, show the commitment of the missionaries who, initially, toiled hard to start these institutions.

Soon the whole enterprise has become a very prestigious issue for the Bishop, the clergy and the people of Madhya Kerala diocese and God has heard their prayers and blessed the sincere efforts of the diocese which is clearly reflected in the set up.

I was invited to visit the place and speak at the Youth Retreat, an annual feature of the Parkal Mission. Rev. Daniel and his wife Jessie received us and Mr. Thomas, the Headmaster introduced me to the congregation.

The morning service held in the church was inspiring one indeed, singing was perfect. What attracted me the

most was the discipline of the congregation which I see very rare elsewhere. Rev. Daniel and the other missionaries who worked earlier must have insisted upon this virtue and worked hard to bring up the congregations in discipline. The youth, boys and girls, behaved well and showed a genuine interest in the church activities. Ashram is an asset; it has been helping the poor and the needy through many programmes it has undertaken.

Some important leaders of the town came to see me and we spent sometime together. They told me how much the presence and the service of the missionaries has been helpful to the town. But it is not without any opposition. The missionaries, although they are being welcomed for their service and sacrifice, some people are jealous of their good work which is seen even in the number of conversions that are taking place, besides a considerable progress in all aspects of the congregational life. God has been sustaining their mission and providing courage to face such oddities and allowing them to press forward to the goal set before them. Bishops and the concerned committees down the history have been prudent in encouraging such worthy outreach programme. Bishop Sam Matthew (Madhya Kerala), with full conviction, has been offering all the support the missionaries and the workers require.

One of the merits of the church is the missionary activities although carried on only in a few pockets of the northern part and done only by a few dioceses like Tirunelveli Kanya Kumari and South Kerala. But the need for such missionary commitment is far greater than ever before. It is not enough to say we have given top priority for evangelism. We must do something concrete and become truly the sincere co-workers with God who is labouring in His Vineyard.

DASS BABU

Growing and Sharing together in Unity

BISHOP AZARIAH, Madras

(Continued from last issue)

GROWTH IN UNITY

'Growing' is the most essential characteristic of ongoing process of Unity. The dimensions of growth of anything or any person may be horizontal or vertical, broadening or deepening, qualitative or quantitative, Spiritual or structural, inner or outer growth etc. With these above criteria, if we are to evaluate the Unity of our Church achieved over the past 48 years, we can't but praise the Lord of the Church, for the measure of growth in different aspects of the Life and Work of our United Church of South India. Thus, numerically speaking, over the five decades almost 200% has been added to the baptized membership even if majority were biological additions. 50% new diocese were added to reach the present total of 21 dioceses today including the one in Jaffna in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. Again there has been marked increase in the goods and services delivered for the whole society through our health care and educational institutions as well as through social and economic development projects with major support from Church related aid agencies from abroad. Such secular and non-religious programmes for social upliftment and justice for the oppressed masses were greatly promoted when these were identified as urgent and relevant Priorities for the Mission of the Church in the 1980s. (See the book published under the same title by C.S.I Synod 1982). Following this, 3 major departments of the Synod, namely Council for Education, Council for Healing Ministry and Council for Development (CTVT) were established and they started functioning with great challenge and success in their respective fields in every diocese over the past decade spending several crores of rupees mostly benefiting those outside the Church. Such is the growth of our secular mission. As regards initiatives for inner spiritual growth, one must cite the act of introduction of the VELCOM programme towards the end of the 1980s to inspire and motivate all our 12,000 and more local congregations with Bible study booklets etc., published at the Synod level. But to what extent the dioceses were involved in promoting the Vision for Equipping the Local Congregations for Mission is a moot question. Specifically the inner spiritual growth in the local congregation was to be achieved through the four-fold engagement in Mission through (a) Agape - fellowship monthly meetings, (b) Agenda - setting,

identifying needs and concerns of the local community as a whole, (c) Analysis of problems, issues, difficulties and possibilities in responding to those needs and concerns, (d) Action - programmes towards realising the vision of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth for which the whole church and every christian prays everyday. 'Thy Kingdom come on earth..'. Such spiritual longing was bound to lead our Church as the Community of believers in Christ not only to grow in the spirit of Unity but also empower us all to demonstrate our organic oneness belonging to the one family with God as father (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:15). We would not only love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:31) but also accept them as our brothers and sisters even as the human Jesus did (Mt. 25:40). Another source of spiritual growth in the Church of course is the liturgy around the sacraments of baptism and eucharist as beautifully articulated in our book of Common Worship. But, how far this liturgy, acknowledged even by the Roman Catholics as being superior to their own liturgy, has been the means for growing in the Spirit of Unity?

It is estimated that after nearly five decades, the book of Common Worship is being used fairly widely in as many as over 1,000 pastorates. This leaves about 200 pastorates who still find it difficult to give up their preunion denominational preferences in their ways of worshipping the one God, Father of us all. We must thank God that the freedom of the spirit, inherently available in our United Church right from its inception, hailed as the most important event in Church history since Pentecost, continues to be available to be expressed in different varieties of Spirituality.

However, the real freedom in the spirit relating to the way and forms of worship in our congregations are being found in the varieties of liturgies prepared for special occasions and celebrations such as Harvest Festival, Children's Festival, Ecology Festival etc., in different dioceses and even pastorates. Extempore prayers and sharing of the word of God in cottage prayer meetings and prayer cells formed in the congregation and pastorate level with enthusiastic participation by large number of lay people is another evidence of liturgical freedom in the spirit. The role of the women in such prayer and praise meetings and family worship services etc., has been increasing and noteworthy. In this connection we must thank God, Ordination of women thus to ensure women's role and participation within the three-fold ministry of the Church,

has been accepted by the Synod right from 1976 but was finally included in the constitution in 1984. So much so today, we have atleast 8 of our dioceses having about 40 ordained women in full-time ministry in our church. Surely these are clear evidence of inner and spiritual growth of the church in the context of the traditional subordination of women in the society. Thus there are several specific areas of growth towards unity in the Church that make for Christian maturity as individual members and as community of believers in different congregations of our church.

Conclusion: Given 'the state of the Union of our church' as outlined above reviewing the past 5 decades, what are the prospects and future possibilities for growth in Unity and Mission of this Church of South India?

First, the present situation would call for an *urgent shift in the self understanding about our Church* by all the members whether at Synod level, Diocesan level or local congregation level. Conscious and concerted efforts need to be taken for systematic Christian Education with specially prepared literature in all 4 languages rather than only in English that will challenge and encourage the so-called grass-roots or ordinary member of the Church to discover the meaning and joy of his/her faith as well as the context and appropriate styles of living out their Christian life in their respective villages and towns etc. *Secondly*, there is the need to instill in every Christian believer in the Church *an inclusive spirit and attitude in the matter of relating to their immediate neighbours both within the fellowship of the church and in the society.* This is necessary to shake them out of the age-old customs and traditions that had entrenched them in their natural prejudice and even hatred towards those outside the circles of their family and community. Church members need to be trained consciously to jump out of their shells of ethnocentrism, communalism and exclusivism. Such deep change in the attitudes and relationships with 'other' people beyond their own fences and barriers, itself will ensure growth in Unity as well as of encouragement in Mission of the Church. *Thirdly*, there needs to be *dynamic openness in the part of the christian community, the Church towards every department of life*, whether social, political, cultural etc., in the society at large in the world.

This will be in keeping with our proper understanding of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. De. Vissert Hooft (the General Secretary of the W.C.C. 1948) affirmed saying, 'The Church is the inner circle and the world the outer circles, both together are the realms over which Christ is the king.' This implied that any expression of christian church unity must have to merge with the Unity of the World Community. Such alone can be true Ecumenism.

It is my earnest prayer and hope for the next 50 years, our Church will diligently and relevantly take the necessary initiatives for Mission in Christ way atleast along the lines specifically identified above. However, thank God that the Lord of the Church and of human history has not left us without a witness but had given the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable and empower His Church (Acts 1:8) to work for the coming of His Kingdom, thus making all things new (Rev. 21:5) so that 'In Christ there is a New Creation' (II Cor. 5).

What then would be the practical implications of the above specific proposals, which however are not exhaustive nor complete.

- 1) The need for self understanding and attitudinal change on the part of every member of our Church would call for a bold theological stance of Re-Visioning of the nature and calling of the Church as well as its Unity and Mission. The Christian Church in South India has had the distinction of producing several globally acknowledged theologians, such as Chenchiah, Appasamy, Devanandan and others a generation ago and in our own times M.M. Thomas of the Mar Thoma Church, Samuel Ryan of the Roman Catholic Church and Dr. J.R. Chandran and Dr. S.J. Samartha of our own Church as noted among them all. But during the past five decades and despite four of our own language area Theological Colleges and two well known research oriented colleges at Madras and Bangalore not too many writing Prophets have emerged from our own Church. Hence there is a large scope and need for raising well trained theologians from different parts of our great Church. Particularly lay theologians like M.M. Thomas are urgently needed. The C.S.I. may have to consciously search for talent to be trained as theologians with deep experience and vision of God revealed in Jesus Christ to this world. Such initiatives should not only be left to the Diocese but should also be at Synod level, so that necessary leadership may emerge in increasing numbers to ensure adequate and appropriate christian nurture and theological education of both illiterate and even literate members of our large Church located in the 4 distinct language and cultural areas. Thus only by proper education of our christian masses in the Church our Church can become transformed and enabled to function as an agent of change and instrument of justice for all both within and outside the Church. Did not our Master hope that we will be 'The light of the world?' (Matthew 5:14).

- 2) As regards the basic inclusive Spirit and openness to the neighbours on the part of every member of our Church, there is an urgent need for challenging all our Dioceses and local congregations to initiate deliberate dialogical approach to Mission as well as for the Unity of the Church. Thus for e.g. conscious efforts and opportunities should be initiated at the Synod and Diocese and local congregation levels for our members to engage in personal contacts and relationship through dialogue with people of other faiths and no faith. However, this would call for obedience to the new commandment of Christ not only to love our neighbour but also accept them as our brothers and sisters (Matthew 25:40) and (John 20:10). This also will demand accepting one another as equal partners in dialogue relationship as individuals or as communities of any faith. For one thing in the pluralistic context of India's varied and dominant religions the less than 3% Christianity would have to shed its Minority Complex before engaging in dialogical relationships with other fellow Indians. Further, verbal dialogue or intellectual conversations would have to be substantiated by genuine love for other fellow human beings and sacrificial service both by individuals and as communities of Christian faith. This is, what, I believe Jesus meant when he told His disciples 'You are the Salt of the Earth' (Matthew 5:13).
- 3) The most necessary thing for an authentic Christian presence of the Church in India is of course our dynamic openness to the world around us. The Church is sent into the World, says Jesus, even as His Father - God had sent Him into this World (John 20:21). Indeed He put it more gravely saying : 'I send you like sheep into the midsts of the wolves', (Matthew 1:16) thus insisting on the way of the Cross as the authentic way to be in Mission in Christ's way. But then He has also assured us all saying 'But take courage; I have conquered the world' (John 16:33). Therefore we are to function as 'The Yeast in the

lump of flour' (Matthew 13:33) to be the leaven in our society. For such is the process by which Kingdom of God for which the Church is only a sign, takes on its own shape on this earth. The Lord of the Church and of human history declared 'Behold make all things new' (Rev. 21:5). If such is the Christian vision for the future and destiny of this world and the universe what would be the specific and relevant role of our Church in the midst of this predominantly Hindu society with its inexorably emerging 'Hindutva' philosophy of life? Clearly the minority Christian Church is called upon to propose a viable Ideological Alternative relevant and appropriate to the pluralistic context of India. What would be the shape of such an Ideological Alternative will have to be of course worked out in the coming decades in dialogical relationship not only with other religious and communal minorities but also with the pre-dominant Hindu majority. Already an attempt in this direction had been made by Dr. M.M. Thomas through his proposals like for, 'Christ Centered Syncretistic Fellowship' or through his proposed Ethics for Common Humanity in Christ for building a truly World Human Community. Our own C.S.I. theologians would have to make further explorations on these and other alternatives but more urgently the Church today needs to join with and participate in all those movements in India, whether Secular, Political, Cultural, Ecological or Religious Movement that work for Justice, Peace and Integrity of the whole Creation. As one e.g. I would point to the recently started organisation in Madras called 'Harmony-India' working for communal reconciliation and harmony between Hindus, Muslims and other religious groups under the leadership of the Prince of Arcot, Mr. Mohammed Ali, Dr. Christopher Kurie and Mr. N. Ram and others. This is how we can honestly pray to God saying 'Thy Kingdom Come On Earth'.

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Community of the Cross

REV. DR. M. MANI CHACKO, *Madras*

Every religion and ideology has its own visual symbol. In Buddhism, there is the *lotus flower*, depicting either the cycle of birth and death or the emergence of beauty and harmony out of the muddy waters of chaos. There is the *Shield or Star of David* in Modern Judaism, speaking of God's covenant with David. In Islam, there is the symbol of the *Crescent*, depicting a phase of the moon as a symbol of sovereignty. In Christianity, there is the CROSS. What is of interest is, the earliest symbol of Christianity was not the CROSS. Because of persecution and the shamefulness of death on the cross, CROSS was first avoided. On Catacombs (underground burial places) there were paintings of a peacock, a dove, athlete's victory palm or a fish. The second century persecuted Christians preferred to paint Noah's ark, Daniel in the lion's den, Jonah and the fish etc. as a possible symbol. But none of these symbols spoke fully of Christ. Different other possibilities arose

- the crib or manger
- the carpenter's bench
- the boat
- the apron or towel
- the stone of the tomb
- the throne
- the dove.

But the chosen symbol came to be a CROSS. Christians wished to commemorate as central to their thoughts, neither his birth nor his youth, neither his teaching nor service, neither his resurrection nor reign, nor his gift of the Spirit, but his *death*, his *crucifixion*, depicting powerfully that Christianity is a *community of the CROSS*.

What does it mean to be a community of the Cross?

A. Firstly, *the Community of the CROSS is a Community of Celebration*

Why do we celebrate? Because of the new relationship wrought by Christ through the Cross. Now because of the CROSS, there is 'access' and 'nearness' to God. The old estranged relationship is replaced by boldness, love and joy. Previously we were afraid, but now love has driven out that fear. In the place of fear, there is love for God and for the other. In the Old Testament, to begin with,

God is presented as very near to humankind. In the Garden of Eden, God is presented in anthropological terms - God 'walking', God 'talking' etc. After the fall, God is presented as 'distant' and God appears through mediums - visions, dreams, prophets etc. The 'nearness' of God to humankind and humankind to God was lost. But through the Cross, the old relationship is regained. And this we should celebrate.

This spirit of celebration, however, should not only be reflected in worship and prayer gatherings but more in daily living and relationship in our work, in our homes, in our relationships with people at home, in church and in society. God is indeed accessible devoid of any fear, by anyone, rich or poor, strong or weak, male or female, high caste born or lower caste born. We can approach him as we are, in our weakness and in moments of strength. And this is indeed a matter of celebration. Normally, our appreciation of the Cross is sentimental and emotional. One only has to go through that narrow, rough street in Jerusalem called 'Via Dolorosa' (the way of the Cross) where one sees visitors from all over the World come and carry a wooden Cross in turns, stopping at every place where Jesus stopped carrying the Cross, (the Stations of the Cross) and finally entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, kissing the tomb where Jesus' body was laid and finally arriving in Golgotha which is housed within the church. This indeed is a very individualistic emotional exercise. This kind of emotional and sentimental appreciation may have its own impact in human lives. But the challenge of Cross is more to be seen in being a community of the Cross, a community of celebration marked by joy and love all the time, even in moments of crisis—simply because, God is with us.

B. Secondly, *the Community of the CROSS is a Community of Self - Understanding and Self - denial*

Cross revolutionizes our attitude to ourselves and others. Who are we? How should we think of ourselves? What attitude should we adopt towards ourselves? Cross provides answers. We are a community created in God's image. Due to the fallen nature of humankind, that image was lost. But through the Cross that image is restored and recreated. Because we are recreated in God's image, there is a sense of dignity and divinity in us. We are the

representatives of God on earth. The best way to be representatives of God on earth is by following a culture of Service which Christ himself depicted through his own life and ministry. One powerful instance which challenges us is the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. This was indeed a powerful act of Service. In Mark 10 : 35-45, this was clearly conveyed to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to Serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'.

This Spirit of Service should be exhibited in different spheres:

- (a) *In Christian Home* between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters.
- (b) *In Church* between the Pastor and the Congregation and viceversa and between each other. The spirit of service exhibits a spirit of humility and not authority.
- (c) *In the World* outside where there are poor and needy, broken and bereaved.

Thus Self – understanding leads to Self – denial. The realisation that we are God's image restored and recreated challenges us to deny ourselves for the sake of the other. The Community of the Cross should be a community of Self – understanding and Self – denial. A higher image of ourselves enables us to view others with dignity and respect and this, in turn helps us to cultivate and exhibit a spirit of Service.

C. Thirdly, the Community of the CROSS is a Community of Forgiveness

This is yet another challenge which comes from the Cross, Jesus, in that moment of agony and anguish did not hate those who tortured and persecuted him but prayed for them: 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do', Cultivating and practising a culture of Forgiveness is one of the greatest needs of humankind

- between husband and wife
- between parents and children
- between pastor and congregation
- between members of the congregation.

Dr. Kenneth Dale, a professor of Christian Counseling tells about an experience he had with a couple, whose marriage was on the verge of collapse. The wife came to Dr. Dale and expressed her problems she has been having with her husband—that her husband fully gets drunk every night and beats her terribly. When it became an everyday affair, she also became very bitter and angry and stopped waiting for him. Before the husband came she began to sleep off. She just hated her husband. Their

relationship began to crumble. Dr. Dale talked with her separately. When the wife came again, Dr. Dale suggested that he would propose an idea to solve the crisis. He said to her to go and tell her husband 'I am sorry'. Initially she could not agree with this proposition. But she agreed to try it out. As usual the husband came fully drunk that night. This night she was waiting for him, quite contrary to the usual practice. She received her husband wholeheartedly and took him into the bedroom. The next day morning when they came together for breakfast, the wife mustered courage, and went and hugged her husband saying 'I am sorry'. The husband was taken aback and began to indulge in retrospection: 'I had caused all the havoc in this home, yet my wife tells me she is sorry'. Just like a bolt from the blue, he began to understand himself, his problems and he took a decision that morning that he will never again get addicted to drinks. Life began to change for them. Love and laughter filled the house again the time. Because the wife learnt the art of forgiveness she could win her husband and restore the broken relationship.

There are people who 'persecute us' (Romans 12:14) who does 'evil' to us (vs. 17), who may even be described as our enemies (vs. 20). What is our attitude to them? In the light of the CROSS, how do we react? The CROSS challenges us to cultivate in us and to be involved in a culture of forgiveness.

D. Fourthly, the Community of the CROSS is Community of Creative Suffering.

Cross symbolises suffering. Christianity is the way of the Cross. For every Christian there is a Cross:

- disability of mind and body
- poverty
- bereavement
- loneliness
- broken love affair
- an unhappy marriage etc.

In those moments, we not only ask God 'why', 'what to me' we do not hesitate even to curse God. Joseph Parker, a minister up to the age of 68, never had any religious doubt. Then his wife died and his faith collapsed. He wrote in his autobiography: 'In that dark hour, I became almost an atheist. For God had set his foot upon my prayers and treated my petitions with contempt. If I had seen a dog in such agony as mine, I would have pitied and helped the dumb beast, yet God spat upon me and cast me out as an offence ...'.

How does the CROSS speak to us in pain? It challenges us to make our suffering creative. Suffering is a part of Christian life and this needs to be realistically accepted. Jesus, in Gethsamane prayed 'If it is your will

remove this cup from me'. On the Cross, he cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me'? Yet he was realistic of his mission and accepted suffering as part of his life.

In 1967, Joni Earechson was a beautiful athletic teenager. She then had a terrible diving accident which left her a quadriplegic. She became very bitter. Slowly through her family and friends, she came to trust the sovereignty of God and started a new life of mouth-painting and public-speaking.

Dr. Paul Tournier, in his book CREATIVE SUFFERING, makes reference to life-stories of history's most influential politicians that nearly three hundred of them were orphans—Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, George Washington, Napoleon, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, etc. Dr. Tournier confirmed from his fifty years of clinical experience that they have made their suffering creative. He said 'I have seen them change through suffering'.

Suffering is inevitable. It is part of life. We cannot run away from it. The right question in moments of

suffering, would be, *not* 'Why do I suffer', but 'How do I cope with the Suffering and make it creative?' Jesus, through his suffering on the CROSS won salvation for the whole creation. Thus his suffering was creative.

Conclusion

Count Zinzendorf, the founder of MORAVIAN BRETHREN, stood in the art of gallery of Dusseldorf at the age of 19, before a painting by Domenico Feti entitled Ecce Homo, in which Christ is portrayed wearing the crown of thorns and underneath an inscription: 'All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?' Zinzendorf's response was the founding of the MORAVIAN BRETHREN, a movement centred on the CROSS. The CROSS challenges us to be a COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS marked by CELEBRATION, SELF UNDERSTANDING and SELF-DENIAL, FORGIVENESS and CREATIVE SUFFERING. The right response to the CROSS is not through mere emotional and sentimental appreciation of the CROSS, but through committing ourselves in building up a *Community of the CROSS*. To that end may God empower us. Amen.

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Sir,

I desire to present to you Rt. Rev. Vasant Samuel Punyavanthappa Dandin who, at the recommendation of the Senate, the Master and the Council of Serampore College have resolved to confer the Degree of Doctor of Divinity Honoris causa, in recognition of his service to the Church in India.

Born on 22nd April, 1934 at Dharwad, Karnataka, Bishop Dandin earned his B.A. Degree and the M.A from the Karnataka University in 1976. In response to his decision to join the ministry of the church, he pursued B.D. Degree studies and passed in 1960. He attended the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey to engage in advance studies.

Bishop Dandin organised the rural congregations providing living facilities in remote areas. He served as a Pastor for a period of 24 (twenty-four) years before he was consecrated Bishop of Karnataka Northern Diocese in 1981. His devotion to duty has drawn confidence from the Churches in South India that he was elected to the high ecclesiastical post as Moderator of the CSI from 1992.

His commitment to Social uplift of the downtrodden led him to various activities of development in a large measure receiving recognition from the Karnataka Government. He served some Christian Social Organisations in various capacities to bring their resources to the people in need.

Bishop Dandin is a person with unusual resourcefulness and dynamism. He expends himself in the cause the Church not counting the cost. His willingness to be with his people as a servant among servants of God has earned him the love of many.

The Senate and the Council of Serampore College feel proud that as an alumnus of the Theological University he has given leadership to the Church and contributed to the betterment of the poor and the neglected people in his region.

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[NCCI. UNIT-V]

1. Youth Empowerment for Transformation (YET)

The Church in India is in great need of youth leadership. The training of leaders has been an urgent need expressed by Churches and Ecumenical Youth Movements. Keeping the need of the hour in mind, the Youth Unit of NCCI organised a Course on 'Cadre Building', from 9-15 January, at Christian Council Lodge, Nagpur. The aim of the Course was to create a group of young people who will act as catalysts in the local community which is becoming rapidly insensitive to our commitment to socio-political issues. The course was designed to enable our young people and youth leaders to envision a vision for future by drawing the strength from our faith in God.

A good number of youths from different parts of this land attended in this special training. In his inaugural message, Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, General Secretary of NCCI, challenged the youths to become 'Change Agent' of this society. He emphasised that the empowerment means the ability to apply our freedom in responsibility towards our community. Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph in his sessions dealt on Social Analysis, and Tools of Social Analysis. Rev. Jeevan Babu, Secretary Unit II, NCCI inspired the youths with his thought provoking talk on 'Gospel and Culture'. Dr. Satish Gyan, Director RCDRC took one session on 'Faith and Social Action'. Dr. Khandewale, Director, Business Management Department, Nagpur University discussed about NEP, SAP, GATT, IMF and WTO and its adverse effect on Indian Economy. Mr. Bodhankar, Chief Editor of the Lokmat Times and Mr. C. Naidu, Chief Editor of Indian Express, Nagpur took sessions on Media Analysis, Communications skills, Editorial, Feature Writing, Report Writing. Mr. P.V. Mall, Director, ISI, Nagpur spoke on 'Role of Youth in Changing World'. Fr. Abraham Oommen, Secretary, Unit I, NCCI took two sessions on 'Challenges of Ecumenism in the 21st century and Christian Response to Modern Media'. Mr. Sudipta Singh, Youth Secretary, while coordinating the training spoke on sessions on Group Dynamics, Interpersonal Skill Development and 'Re-reading the Bible through the eyes of Women'.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMES: Rural Youth Empowerment Programme [RYEP]

Background

Due to rapidly changing society, the rural youth are becoming much confused about their own future. They lack the direction in life. They adapt the western life-style and new values of life under the propaganda of consumerism

and capitalism. This has also widened the already existing gaps between the rich, the middle-class and the poor and between the people living in the rural and urban areas. Our young people have been brainwashed that they feel there is no hope living in the rural community without money or material things in life.

And with this concept, they are trying to engage in unlawful activities just to gain material things. In this situation training of rural youth has been urgent need expressed by the churches and ecumenical youth organisations. We need to build up a group of young people who will act as catalyst in the local community.

Objectives :

- ♣ To develop the leadership skills among rural youths.
- ♣ To prepare the rural youth to face the new challenges which threaten their existence in the name of liberalisation and the New Industrial and Economic Policy.
- ♣ To study the Panchayat Raj Act (73rd Constitutional Amendment Act).
- ♣ To instil a sense of direction and confidence in the minds of Rural Youths who are let down by the political process in this country.
- ♣ To support and facilitate the enhancement of rural youths awareness of their situation and leadership capabilities.
- ♣ To help to identify specific strategic rural communities and facilitate its transformation through alternative economic activities.
- ♣ To initiate the establishment, consolidation and strengthening of networks and support groups/structures for rural youth work.
- ♣ To raise awareness of rural youth on major economic issues.
- ♣ To develop skills for social, economic and political analysis.

GOOD NEWS TO YOUTH

Mr. Sudipta Singh is NCCI's New Youth Secretary. Mr. Sudipta, is Bengali by birth. SCMer by tradition, Bachelor by status, dynamic by energy scales. Master's graduate and P.G. Diploma holder in Personal Management by education, Liberal by theological persuasion, friendly, active and just human by nature. What else qualification you need for a Youth Secretary of NCCI to make Indian Youth feel that they are something? We accord a warm welcome to him in the NCCI family. Kindly extend your helping hand and remember him in your prayers.

NEWS FROM THE DIOCESES

DORNAKAL DIOCESE

Chinna Gopathy is a small village tucked away twenty kilometers from Khammam in the diocese of Dornakal. There are about 100 Christian families, mostly of the agricultural labourers class. There a few who own pieces of land. By and large, they are peace loving people and certainly a worshipping community.

They found VELCOM useful when they were faced with a problem.

They have a church—a tiled house which was built a couple of decades ago. This church quite insufficient to house all the members. More than half of them had to sit outside, almost on a street road. It had become a problem as to build a new church would cost enormously and an Herculean task for a small congregation of that nature.

Providentially, the elders of the village Mr. Kotte James, Mr. Bhushanam and Lazarus met Rev. Dr. Dass Babu, the coordinator of the VELCOM, at Khammam. Their aim was to collect some donation as he belongs to the same diocese. The meeting led them to have a new experience. There was a chance for them to know more about VELCOM – the implied power of the people and the value of the local resources. Having been convinced by the VELCOM, they went back, called all the members of the congregation and had a through discussion about cost of the new church building and the money they had to collect. The village leaders and the pastor Rev. B. Devadas told the people all about VELCOM. After the

initial hiccups, the congregation began to pool their local resources, by donating a day's income; in the case of office workers, it is one month's salary; by donating material like stones, bricks etc and finally the amount touched Rs. 2,00,000/- A miracle indeed! They still need about Rs 50,000/- They are struggling but with a great hope. Bishop D. Noah Samuel, Bishop of the diocese, is encouraging the congregation go ahead with their programme.

Rev. Dass Babu visited the village, spent a day with the people encouraging and inspiring them through the VELCOM.

KARNATAKA NORTHERN DIOCESE

Karnataka Northern Diocese celebrates its SILVER JUBILEE in this year. The Most Rev. Dr. Vasant P. Dandin inaugurated its Silver Jubilee celebrations on 16th November 1995 at Bishop Gernot Jung Memorial Hall during its tenth ordinary meeting of the Diocesan Council at Dharwad. A detailed programme was worked out to celebrate the Jubilee celebrations throughout they year in the diocese at various levels involving congregations.

Ordination Services

The Most Rev. Dr. Vasant P. Dandin created history in the diocese by ordaining the Rev. (Mrs) Ratna Nandakumar as the first Woman Presbyter on Sunday the 24th of September 1995 at the All Saints Church, Dharwad. Rev. J. Prabhakara Rao, Moderator's Chaplain, made all the arrangements for this historical event.

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2-8254-1187-6, paperback, 500pp.

SFr. 35-, US \$29.50, £18.50

Co-published with Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, USA

TURN TO GOD – REJOICE IN HOPE

Bible Studies, Meditations, Liturgical Aids

The eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches, planned for September 1998 in Harare, Zimbabwe, will come at a special moment: the fiftieth anniversary of the WCC's founding in Amsterdam in 1948. The theme chosen for this jubilee gathering, "Turn to God — Rejoice in Hope", evokes a wealth of biblical imagery for commemorating the past with an eye to the challenges the churches face together at the dawn of a new millennium. Designed to help the churches use the Bible to prepare for the Harare assembly, this three-part resource book, suitable for either personal reflection or group study, includes seven Bible studies exploring facets of the churches' life together ecumenically, six meditations developing facets of the theme itself and a collection of resource material particularly chosen for liturgical use during the Lenten period. The Bible studies were written

by Musimbi Kanyoro on the basis of the work of an international consultation of biblical teachers and scholars; the meditations were written by Pauline Webb using materials from Christians around the world; and the liturgical materials were prepared by a team of people from a number of Orthodox churches.

2-8254-1185-X, paperback, approx. 88pp.

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Violence has broken out in more than fifty places around the world between peoples who share the same terrain but differ in ethnicity, race, language or religion. Rapid population growth, diminishing resources, increasing unemployment and migration and lack of education make conditions ripe in many other places for such outbreaks of bloodshed and death. The churches are not only confronted by the issue of ethnic conflict because of their commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace, but often are involved in the conflicts themselves because their own identity is tied up with one ethnic group. This book is intended to help concerned Christian individuals, congregational Christian education programmes and local study groups to think through issues of ethnicity and nationalism, noting the complexities often obscured by popular stereotypes, stimulating biblical and theological reflection on ethnic identity and suggesting how they might helpfully respond to such conflicts.

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Many people understand the world "liturgy" only in terms of what goes on inside a church building: prayers, songs and chants, recital of the creed, proclamation of the Word, the eucharist. Yet St. John Chrysostom, the source of one of the best-known liturgies in the Orthodox tradition, spoke of two altars — one in the church, one in the public marketplace. The "liturgy after the liturgy" is thus a way of expressing the inseparability of theological visions from committed engagement in society and culture. The author shows how the liturgy itself reflects an understanding

of the church as both gathered for worship and sent out to the ends of the earth. During the worship, the word is proclaimed to all, not only verbally but also through the eucharist, by which we "proclaim the Lord's death till he comes". The eucharistic elements are "food for pilgrims" in their everyday struggles, and the eucharist itself is a model of sharing that could transform the world. And the concluding words of the liturgy — "Go forth in peace" — send the communicants into the world to witness to Christ's resurrection.

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Todor Sabev

THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE WCC

Towards the future

A church historian and veteran ecumenist here issues a bold call to his fellow Orthodox Christians to take stock of their ecumenical experience and renew their commitment to the unity of the church as "a joint effort of drawing nearer to Christ and carrying his cross together". That, he believes, will enable the Orthodox churches to make a dynamic contribution to the life of the WCC in the twenty-first century. Among the topics unfolded in this creative study are the biblical and theological presuppositions of ecumenism, perceptions and misperceptions of the WCC among the Orthodox churches, the requirements of visible unity and ecumenical hermeneutics. In his concluding chapter, the author looks at "hierarchy of truths" as a method in the quest for unity, Orthodox canon law and ecumenism, and the proposal for a "pre-conciliar" gathering of all churches at the end of the second millennium.

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Bethlehem's mayor says Christ's birthplace needs massive help

Elias Freij, mayor of the City of Bethlehem, has told an international group of Christian pastors that Christians worldwide must help to renew the city where Jesus was born.

Freij singled out the devastating impact — on Bethlehem's residents — of the extended closure of Bethlehem's crossing into Jerusalem. (Unemployment in Bethlehem and other cities of the Israeli-occupied West Bank is now more than 50 per cent. When the Israeli occupation of the city ended in December, Bethlehem's residents began to regain hope and confidence. Now despondency is again widespread).

Freij also said he feared that the Israeli closure would spark a new exodus from his city, especially among Christians.

Freij, a Greek Orthodox Christian who has been mayor of Bethlehem for 23 years, also complained that Israel had broken the agreements in the Oslo peace accord by planning to confiscate more land in Bethlehem's northern section to build a military road, erect electronic barriers, and construct a new settlement for Israelis on the hill in the Fields of the Shepherds.



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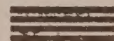
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